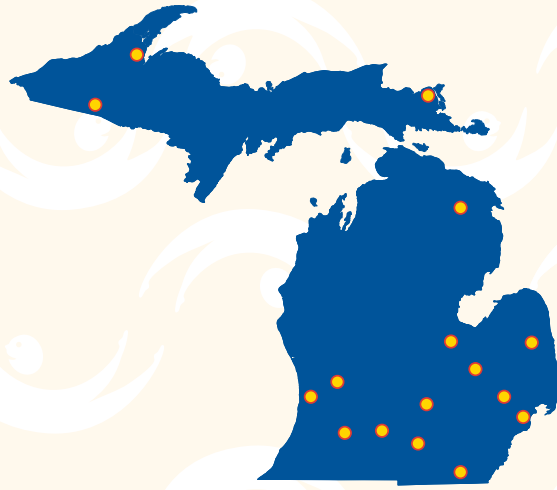




**Playgrounds Where All Kids Are Able to Play**



## Communities Mobilize for Children of All Abilities

**In 1931, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation established the first school in the United States to integrate regular and special education students in the classroom. In honor of its 75th Anniversary in 2005, the Foundation is supporting a statewide effort in Michigan to help communities build fully integrated, universally accessible playgrounds and raise awareness about the benefits of children of all abilities playing together.**

Imagine a childhood in which monkey bars are out of reach, seesaws are too dangerous, and slides don't accommodate you. For too many children with special needs—especially children who are physically challenged—play can be restricted and frustrating.

In response, the Kellogg Foundation's Youth and Education team is funding the Able to Play Project, a special effort to build barrier-free playgrounds throughout Michigan. These are playgrounds that not only greatly expand play opportunities for children with special needs but also serve as a rallying

point for communities to mobilize resources for integration and disability issues.

"Play is an absolute necessity for the development of children's language, motor, and social skills," says Gail McClure, vice president for Youth and Education Programs. "The idea behind the Able to Play Project is that these new play areas will be inclusive of all children—no one is left out."

This is precisely the vision of the National Center for Boundless Playgrounds®, the nonprofit organization coordinating the project. The Connecticut-based group was established in 1997 by a team of parents and child development professionals that was dedicated to working with communities

to create fully integrated, universally accessible play environments for all children.

Much of the inspiration for Boundless Playgrounds (BP) came from its cofounder and executive director Amy Jaffe Barzach and her desire to honor the short life of her son, Jonathon, who died of spinal muscular atrophy in 1995. Together with hundreds of volunteers and donations, Barzach's community built a special, inclusive playground in memory of Jonathon. After an article appeared in "Time" magazine, the phone began ringing. The concept of "boundless playgrounds" touched a nerve.

In 1998, Boundless Playgrounds grew, expanding with a grant from the Hasbro



Children's Foundation to launch a national awareness campaign and to fund technical assistance to 24 communities. By mid-2003, BP had helped more than 60 communities in 21 states develop their own playgrounds.

Now BP is launching a major statewide effort in Michigan with a multimillion-dollar Kellogg Foundation grant. Most of the award will provide Able to Play challenge grants and technical, design, and support services to 13 communities.

"We're pleased these Michigan communities will have completed their learning and construction by 2005 when we celebrate the Foundation's 75th Anniversary," says the Foundation's McClure. "The Able to Play Project ties in very appropriately with the original vision of Mr. Kellogg to help children and create positive community change. This will continue that legacy."

Seven additional communities will receive smaller "seed" awards and design mentoring services. Other Able to Play applicants will be offered opportunities to attend BP's "basic training" workshops that review special play behavior and design criteria.

An ancillary component of the project includes a design competition that is intended to have long-term impact on the art and science of playgrounds. Education and outreach programs along with an upgraded Web site will provide help.

## What makes a Boundless Playground unique?

Although traditional playgrounds may have been built with consideration of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Boundless Playgrounds play environments reach even higher to ensure that children with and without disabilities can play together, according to Jean Schappet, BP's cofounder and creative director.

"Boundless Playgrounds not only include the ADA focus on removing barriers to access, but also incorporate our organization's commitment to child development, rigor, and challenge for all children," Schappet adds. "We believe in the importance of play as an opportunity for learning."

In terms of barriers, federal guidelines require that 50 percent of a playground's elevated structure be accessible. On larger playgrounds, 25 percent of the elevated play platforms must be ramped. By comparison, BP requires that at least 70 percent of play activities serve children with physical disabilities, allowing for greater "integration" of all children.

However, BP play spaces are not just about wheelchair access. They are designed to address the needs of children with sensory and developmental disabilities, too. They are designed to be fun, rigorous, and challenging places for *all* children—not just special needs kids.



The process of creating Boundless Playgrounds is also about educating and changing communities.

"The more communities work with the people and children with disabilities, and the more young children of all abilities play together, the more all kinds of barriers



**Boundless Playgrounds are designed to be fun, rigorous, and challenging places for *all* children—not just special needs kids.**

# Play Is Vital to Children's Development

Children, regardless of ability or disability, learn to navigate their world through play. Evidence from research into brain development shows that challenging environments like well-designed playgrounds will encourage social, emotional, physical and cognitive growth for children.<sup>1</sup>

One in ten children has some type of disability that makes it hard or impossible for them to play on a traditional playground. Boundless Playgrounds projects are designed with a difference. More than 70 percent of the playground is universally accessible to children with physical disabilities, incorporating sensory-rich activities. As a result, children with physical, sensory, and developmental disabilities, and children without disabilities, can actively, safely, and enjoyably play together, each at their own highest level of ability.

Often the play activities and equipment included specifically for children with special needs are especially enjoyed by children without disabilities, who could play anywhere.

<sup>1</sup> "Play is Essential for Brain Development," published by the Children's Institute for Learning and Brain Development

disappear," says Leslyn Odom Clark, BP director of programs.

BP staff say that their playgrounds become a focal point for both children's play and community change.

"People drive hours to experience a Boundless Playground," says Schappet. "When they go back to their own communities, their expectations have been completely changed. They begin to demand that kind of play space.

"It's market-driven," she adds. "Playground equipment manufacturers respond to customers' needs. We've already begun to see that up to 12 additional playgrounds are spawned from each Boundless Playground developed. That's the beauty of what the

Able to Play project will bring to Michigan—these play environments will serve as catalysts where people will see what a playground can be and want to push their own community to do something just like it."

Boundless Playgrounds is working with the Pittsburgh-based Center for Creative Play, a nationally recognized leader in indoor spaces. The Center will work with Boundless Playgrounds to help two Michigan grantee communities first develop and then implement indoor play projects.

The Michigan sites will receive assistance from BP and the Center, including coaching on how to raise matching funds, plan, build, and involve the community even more in their play environment projects. First, each community will assess its needs through a

strategic planning process that involves adult stakeholders and children with and without disabilities. Then, BP and Center designers will work in collaboration with local landscape architects, architects, builders, design professionals, and playground project committees to develop play environments that meet the Able to Play criteria.

Then there's the matter of cost. There is no average cost of construction. But with such features as added ramps, educational activities, and safe, navigable ground surfaces, the total cost can range from \$150,000 to \$400,000 or more. Able to Play challenge grants will give each grantee a strong start, but each grantee must mobilize its community to raise other financial and in-kind resources and, finally, drive the playground projects to completion.

To encourage participation, workshops were held throughout Michigan. Ultimately, grant applications were received from every region of the state. A national panel of judges made up of doctors, educators, nonprofit executives, and other professionals reviewed the applications.

"The judging was weighted in favor of applicants that demonstrated real community collaboration," says Dianne Noth, senior director of operations for Boundless Playgrounds, "as well as commitment to the concept of children and people of all ages and all abilities being able to play together." 📌



Visit [www.abletoplay.org](http://www.abletoplay.org) and take a "virtual tour" of a groundbreaking Boundless Playground effort.



The Able to Play Project is funded by a special grant that is part of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's 75th Anniversary, which will be formally celebrated in 2005. W.K. Kellogg

himself recognized the limited options and resources for children and families with special needs. After an accident, Mr. Kellogg's grandson, Kenneth, was permanently disabled. "[Al]though I was amply able to pay the medical ... bills, I found it



**W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION**  
FROM VISION TO INNOVATIVE IMPACT

almost impossible to obtain adequate treatment for him ...," he wrote. "This caused me to wonder what difficulties were in the paths of needy parents who seek help for their children when catastrophe strikes, and I resolved to lend what aid I could to such children."

**Able to Play includes  
a component that promises  
to have long-term impact  
on the art and science  
of playgrounds.**



## Educational Benefits of Boundless Play

After a Boundless Playground was built at the Baer School in Baltimore, Maryland, principal Shari Huene-Johnson saw significant developmental growth in children with severe disabilities. Before the playground was installed, these students averaged a developmental growth of 1.7 months in each 6-month period. The rate more than doubled afterwards. "That's a phenomenal figure for us," says Huene-Johnson, "and directly attributable to our Boundless Playground, which we use as an outdoor classroom."



## Able to Play Project

- Statewide Michigan effort to build fully integrated, universally accessible playgrounds and raise awareness of the needs of children with disabilities
- Scholarships for playground design and development workshops offered to all other applicants
- Challenge grants ranging from \$75,000 to \$225,000 and technical assistance will help 13 communities open playgrounds by 2005
- Through education and outreach—including collaborating with universities and conference presentations—Boundless Playgrounds will seek to influence future design of children's play environments
- Smaller seed grants and design mentoring for 7 other communities will support the development of additional playgrounds

# Youth-Powered Playground in Sandusky

In Sandusky, Michigan, population just over 2,400, high school students are leading a communitywide effort to help all children be able to play, using a powerful combination of youthful determination and drive. In fact, their Able to Play effort began years before Able to Play was launched.

In November 2000, a group of high school students decided to “gift” a revitalized playground to their community. The K.I.D. Committee (Kids Illustrating Determination) was the brainstorm of a high school senior, Mandy Nesbit, who rallied fellow students to begin raising money for new and safe playground equipment for the city. Nesbit enlisted the guidance of one of her teachers, George Lesacki, and the teens went to work raising money.

“When Mandy graduated, I took over as president,” says Beth Morningstar, who had served as a volunteer in the project, and just finished her junior year at Sandusky High School. “We had been concentrating on fund-raising, but when we learned about the Able to Play matching grant, we were inspired to write the grant proposal.”

Lesacki is quick to point out that it was Morningstar who took the initiative to write the grant herself, then meet with other students for their input. “She took it as a personal challenge and growth opportunity.”

Meanwhile, students continued fund-raising efforts, using every tool from can and bottle drives to a discount golf cart sale. Even the elementary schools have been involved through “Penny Wars,” in which elementary classes compete by bringing in piles of pennies. By May 2003, the K.I.D. Committee had garnered \$20,000 toward the Able to Play effort.

“The entire community is behind us, from our school board to our local businesses. The Sanilac County Community Foundation even awarded us a matching grant,” says



**“This is just the latest  
in a series of community efforts the  
students have gotten behind.”**

Morningstar. “We’re a small community, and we are competing for funds with things like a new hockey arena the community recently funded. But people here are very supportive and pull together.”

“The students have really taken this idea and run with it,” says Lesacki. “This is just the latest in a series of community efforts the students have gotten behind. We don’t look at the park project as that remarkable. It’s just the way young people are here.

“The students meet in my classroom every Tuesday morning, and I am just there for feedback. It’s their meeting, and they throw their ideas out there. Beth Morningstar has really been a go-getter.”

There are only about 1,400 students in the entire school district. “What they lack in numbers they make up for in enthusiasm,” says Lesacki. “When our community recreation director went to the first Able to Play grant writing meeting, she came back with the impression that a community build idea was too labor intensive—that a company should be hired to build the play structure. But our students wanted ownership. They said, ‘No way, we’re going to build it.’”

That’s exactly the community spirit that impressed Boundless Playgrounds. “With us, the community builds the playground with the guidance of professionals, and those professionals do what needs to be done for safety and reliability,” says Debbie Midford, program manager at the National Center for Boundless Playgrounds. “But it definitely takes a community effort.”

In Sandusky, it takes the kids. The community involvement lessons Nesbit learned in Sandusky have remained important to her, even as she finished her freshman year at Northern Michigan University, nearly 400 miles from home. “I love getting involved,” she says. “It gives me a kind of joy to make a difference.” After her first year in college, she’s changing to a dual major in criminal justice and environmental science because, in part, it will provide opportunities to work with communities.

When Nesbit learned Sandusky had received the Able to Play grant, she skipped down the halls of her university dormitory, shouting for joy.



# U.P. Community Rallies Around Playground

When your remote community averages 100 to 150 inches of snow over a very long winter, providing indoor play opportunities for children is a critical need. In their Able to Play proposal, the Sault Ste. Marie Able to Play Advisory Council made this need dramatically clear by including



a photograph of a child bundled in winter gear, in a wheelchair, gazing at a mound of snow covering the city's outdoor playground. Point made.

Even more dramatic was the way the community rallied around the effort to become an Able to Play grantee. Just three years before, the community had thrown its support behind an outdoor playground project, and the Council was a little concerned there might be a "been there, done that" attitude about supporting an indoor play space.

The concern was unwarranted. "There was still so much energy and enthusiasm for doing something like this together," says Kerry O'Conner, who chairs the Board of Directors for the Chippewa Community Foundation.

Tony McLain, chair of the Sault Ste. Marie Able to Play Advisory Council, completely agrees. "We invited a handful of key people to help put together the Able to Play proposal, but before long we had volunteers coming forward from everywhere in the community. This kind of project has really built community will and energy.

"I've spent most of my career working in communities that really don't have the resources that many communities have, and to see our community come together like this, around a project like this, is really fulfilling," says McLain,

who retired as school superintendent in January. "What it means is that you have a community that's working for itself, using all of its resources, to do things for its children of all abilities."

One very creative feature of the Sault Ste. Marie play space is that it will actually be a kind of hybrid—an outdoor Boundless Playground in an enclosed play space with a 25-foot ceiling. "It'll be kind of like a playground in a gym," says O'Conner, adding that such a play space will allow more independent play than do interior play spaces focusing on serving the disabled, which require more staff involvement.

O'Conner points out that approximately 16 percent of the young people ages 5 to 20 in the community have some kind of disability. "We wanted a place where all kids could play together, those with and without disabilities. This will add tremendously to what young children can do during our long, harsh winters."

McLain adds that the indoor Boundless Playground project will serve a far larger area than relatively isolated Sault Ste. Marie. "We will literally serve most of the Upper Peninsula, parts of Canada, and expect to draw visitors from the northern Lower Peninsula as well. Altogether, we expect to draw visitors from a 350-square-mile area."

An additional draw for the Sault Ste. Marie Able to Play project is that it plans to combine the best of universally accessible play spaces with regularly changing educational experiences, such as interactive exhibits about Upper Peninsula history and culture, separately funded by local efforts. "We want to meet the needs of universal accessibility to all children, while also providing educational opportunity on a lot of different levels," says O'Conner. "This will provide an experience that kids will want to come back to over and over during the year."

For Heather MacDonald, a social worker who is the parent of a child with disabilities, the indoor play space will provide play opportunities unavailable anywhere in the Upper Peninsula. "The sensory play is very important to my twelve-year-old daughter—she loves it," says MacDonald, "and the fact that it will be available all year round in our own community is very exciting.

"Plus, I work with a lot of families who are really struggling, and many of them can't afford to have a lot of toys and things that are stimulating and fun in the home. But the ability to go someplace nearby, without charge, is really going to help them."





45 Wintonbury Avenue  
Bloomfield, CT 06002  
Phone: (860) 243-8315  
Fax: (860) 243-5854  
www.abletoplay.org  
www.boundlessplaygrounds.org



Youth and Education Programs

One Michigan Avenue East  
Battle Creek, MI 49017-4058  
Phone: (269) 968-1611  
TDD on site • Telex: 495-3028  
Fax: (269) 968-0413  
www.wkkf.org/YE



Center for Creative Play™

1400 S. Braddock Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15218  
Phone: (412) 371-1668  
www.center4creativeplay.org

## Able to Play Grant Recipient Contact Information

### Major Challenge Grant Recipients\*

#### Youth Sport and Recreation Commission

Dad Butler Playfield, Detroit

**Carla Giles**, Program Director  
313-963-8916  
cgiles@ysrc.org

#### Washtenaw Intermediate School District

High Point School, Ann Arbor

**Jan Culbertson**, Honey Creek Community School Board President  
734-663-1910  
jankc@a3c.com

#### Junior League of Kalamazoo

Upjohn Park, Kalamazoo

**Carol McGlinn**, Past President  
269-388-6009  
mczoo@chartermi.net

#### City of Wyoming

Metropolitan Health Village, Wyoming

**Rebecca Rynbrandt**, Director of Parks and Recreation  
616-261-3520  
rynbrandtb@ci.wyoming.mi.us

#### Lansing School District

Henry H. North Elementary School, Lansing

**Rena Baxter**, Committee Chair  
989-224-1608  
rbaxter@lsd.k12.mi.us

#### Sanilac County Community Foundation

Sandusky City Park, Sandusky

**Beth Morningstar**, Sandusky Park Project Coordinator  
310-648-2055  
bmorstar@hotmail.com

#### Saginaw Community Foundation

Kochville Township

**Lucy Allen**, President/CEO  
989-755-0545  
lucy@saginawcommunityfoundation.org

#### Watersmeet Township School

Watersmeet Township School, Watersmeet

**Gwen Pierce**, Project Coordinator  
906-358-4506  
gpierce@portup.com

#### Hillman Community Education Foundation

Hillman Township Tournament Park, Hillman

**Tom Carlson**, President  
989-742-4255  
etcarlson@voyager.net

#### Sault Ste. Marie Play Advisory Committee

Sault Ste. Marie

**Dr. Tony McLain**, Chairman  
906-632-1829  
tmlain@eup.k12.mi.us

#### Battle Creek Community Foundation

Bailey Park, Battle Creek

**David Lucas**, Trustee  
269-965-7000  
dlucas@vandervoortlaw.com

#### Flint Community Schools

Summerfield/Longfellow Schools, Flint

**William DeFrance**, Chief of Operations  
810-760-1256  
bdefrance@flintschools.org

#### Life Services System

Life Services System, Holland

**Deanna DePree**, Executive Director  
616-396-7566  
ddepre@lifeservicessystem.org

### Design Grant Recipients\*\*

#### West Ottawa Public Schools

Woodside Elementary School, Holland

**Jon Manier**, Principal  
616-786-1900  
ahsjamoi@westottawa.k12.mi.us

#### People's Community Services

Delray Memorial Park, Detroit

**Thomas Cervenak**, Executive Director  
313-554-3111  
tcervenak@aol.com

#### Wing Lake Developmental Center

Wing Lake Developmental Center, Bloomfield Hills

**Cindy Seguin**, Instructional Assistant  
248-341-7900  
seg3832@aol.com

#### Baraga County Community Foundation

Keweenaw Bay Children's Center, Keweenaw Bay

**Gordette Cote**, Executive Director  
906-353-7898  
baragacf@up.net

#### Ingham County Parks

Hawk Island County Park, Lansing

**Brian Collins**, Assistant Parks Manager  
517-676-2233  
bcollins@ingham.org

#### Detroit Open School Parent Council

Detroit Open School, Detroit

**Chris Seguin, Ed.D.**, Council Member  
313-273-6872  
ag1663@wayne.edu

#### Lenawee Community Foundation

Ellis Park, Blissfield

**Billie Patton**, Chairperson  
517-486-5599  
beej@tc3net.com

\* \$75,000—\$225,000 each

\*\* \$25,000 each

■ These will be Center for Creative Play™ indoor play spaces.

YO/ED 4206 • item #410A • 07032.5M.Gargoyle Graphics • Printed on Recycled Paper